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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine what factors attract high school students to journalism, how much students' attitudes toward journalism have changed since the late 1950s, and to suggest methods to encourage high school students to pursue journalism as a career. Subjects, 743 students attending the 1989 Florida Scholastic Press Association Convention, were given a questionnaire to determine how they evaluated journalism as a career choice. The questionnaire asked students how many were planning journalism careers, what their other top career choices were, and who and what primarily influences their perspectives on journalism. Students were asked to rank journalism with nine other career choices; results were compared with similar research carried out in the last 30 years. Current survey results indicated that students ranked "journalist" as number one in terms of interest of work. This indicates that students who choose journalism as a career continue to do so with an awareness of economic realities; they base their decision on journalism as an interesting and useful career. With high school journalism students, journalism continues to be the first choice in terms of career choices. Over 30 years, there is some indication of a modest increase in the number of high school journalism students planning a career in journalism. Involvement in high school publications continues to be the major influence of their decision to go into journalism. Students reported early career decisions to pursue journalism. (Seven tables of data are included.) (MG)

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HIGH SCHOOL JOURNALISM STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD JOURNALISM AS A CAREER: A THIRTY YEAR PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Students attending the 1989 Florida Scholastic Press Association Convention were given a questionnaire to determine how they evaluated journalism as a career choice. The questionnaire asked students how many were planning journalism careers, what their other top career choices were, and who and what primarily influenced their perspectives on journalism. Students were asked to rank journalism with nine other career choices.

The results were compared with similar research carried out in the last thirty years. The purpose of the study was to determine what factors attract high school students to journalism, how much students' attitudes toward journalism have changed since the late 1950s, and to suggest methods to encourage high school students to pursue journalism as a career.

HIGH SCHOOL JOURNALISM STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD JOURNALISM AS A CAREER: A THIRTY YEAR PERSPECTIVE

How and why students decide to train for a career in journalism has been a concern over the past three decades for journalism educators and the newspaper industry.

Weigle (1957) conducted surveys of high school journalism teachers and college students who were former high school publication editors in an effort to determine why there were not more "trained young men for editorial positions" (p. 39).

Over the next few decades, high school and college journalism students have been involved in a number of studies, often focusing on their evaluation of journalism and other careers and the factors that influenced them to go into journalism.

The purpose for the studies has varied over time, depending on the status of the newspaper industry and journalism education at the time of the study.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, studies of high school journalism students (Lubell, 1959; Kimball and Lubell, 1960; Fosdick and Greenberg, 1961) and beginning college journalism students (Cranford, 1960) were concerned with why more students in general were not choosing to go into newspaper careers.

By the 1970s, the concern about journalism students had changed due to the increase of enrollment in journalism programs (Bowers, 1974; Brinkman and Jugenheimer, 1977). Interest also shifted to the recruitment of minority students.

Studies of journalism students in the 1980s (JEA Commission, 1987; Mann, 1988; Dodd, Tipton and Sumpter, 1989) again asked some of the same questions of the earlier studies. But the intent was to examine the shift in most journalism and mass communication colleges from a majority of students being news editorial majors to a majority of students majoring in advertising or public relations.

This study of high school journalism students was conducted to investigate several issues, including

1. What are the factors that influence a student's decision to pursue a career in journalism?
2. How do students of the late 1980s evaluate journalism as a career in comparison to other careers?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

More than a dozen studies of high school journalism students and beginning college journalism students have been conducted over the past 30 years to examine their attitudes about journalism as a career and the factors influencing their decision to pursue journalism. Many of these studies have addressed the

influence of scholastic journalism on a student's career choice and have concluded that high school journalism programs are an important influence on interest in a journalism career.

Weigle (1957) asked college freshmen who had been editors of high school publications what the important sources were for their impressions about journalism as a career. In ranking six sources, students said "high school adviser or other teachers" was most important (35 percent), "reading newspapers and magazines" was second (22 percent), followed by "family and friends" (20 percent), "newspapermen" (17 percent), "reading of fictional or biographical books" (4 percent) and "programs on radio and television and movies" (2 percent). Of the students participating in the study, only 3 percent indicated an intention to major in journalism, and 10 percent said they planned to enter journalism after graduation.

Two studies of high school students attending state, regional and national scholastic journalism conventions (Lubell, 1959; Kimball and Lubell, 1960) found that students did not rank journalism as a highly desirable profession. Lubell (1959) found that 29 percent of the students said they were thinking of making a career in some form of journalism or writing. In ranking nine careers on five criteria, journalism ranked second highest in "interest of work," fifth in "usefulness to society," seventh in "prestige" and "financial rewards," and eighth in "family life."

In the Kimball and Lubell study (1960), boys selected journalism as their top career choice (20 percent), and girls

selected journalism as their second most favored career choice (22 percent), with teaching as the top career choice (31 percent). In ranking 11 careers in terms of perceived satisfaction, boys ranked journalism as first in "interest," sixth in "usefulness," seventh in "prestige," eighth in "financial reward," ninth in "family life," and eleventh in "economic security." Overall, journalism ranked eighth of the eleven careers in terms of career satisfactions.

In a study of beginning journalism students at the University of Nebraska, Cranford (1960) found that 36 percent of the males and 43 percent of the females said that their interest in journalism developed *prior* to their senior year in high school. He concluded that efforts to recruit students into journalism should begin earlier than the student's final year in high school.

Bowers (1974) cited the dramatic increase in enrollment in college journalism programs -- an 85 percent increase in enrollment nationally between 1962-1972 -- as the catalyst for his study of journalism students at the University of North Carolina. When students were asked to rank journalism career aspects compared with other careers, they ranked journalism high in terms of interesting work (2.90 on a scale of 1-3) and usefulness to society (2.85) and low in terms of financial reward (1.63) Bowers also found that although 55 percent of the students anticipated being in newspaper reporting and editing jobs after

graduation, only 30 percent saw themselves working for newspapers five years later.

Brinkman and Jugenheimer (1977) conducted a study of college journalism majors to determine the students' primary reasons for majoring in journalism and to see how introductory college journalism courses influenced the students' academic career decisions. When students were asked what factors first prompted them to consider majoring in journalism, "exposure to journalism in high school was by far the most important such initial influence; it was mentioned by 23 percent of the students" (p. 45). One of the four conclusions of the study was "High school journalism programs should be actively supported, especially to attract students into news-editorial emphasis of journalism" (p. 60).

Two studies conducted in the 1980s (Haugh and Oates, 1981; JEA Commission, 1987) examined the impact of a student's involvement in a high school journalism program and the student's decision to go into a career in journalism.

Haugh and Oates conducted surveys of beginning newswriting students at the University of Alabama and Indiana University. They divided the students into two groups -- those who had been on a high school publication staff and those who had not. At the University of Alabama, almost half of the beginning newswriting students had worked on a high school publication. At Indiana University, 56.5 percent of the students were staffers.

Haugh and Oates found that staffers made career decisions sooner than nonstaffers. At the University of Alabama, 50 percent of the staffers decided on a communications career while in high school, compared to a 36.4 percent of the nonstaffers. At Indiana University, 73.8 percent of the staffers decided on a communications career while in high school, in contrast to only 27.7 percent of the nonstaffers.

A landmark study of the impact of high school journalism programs was the Journalism Education Association study, conducted by the American College Testing program. ACT selected 10 colleges and universities and identified 19,249 students. The students were divided into those who had worked on a high school publication staff and those who had not.

The ACT study found that more than four times as many publications students (10.33 percent) as non-publications students (2.55 percent) indicated a desire to enter communication professions. In selecting college majors, former publications students ranked communications as the fourth most popular choice, whereas non-publication students did not rank communications as one of their top eight choices.

The Associated Press Managing Editors' Journalism Education Committee (1987) examined the issue of why the top journalism students were not pursuing careers with newspapers. The last two pages of the 24-page report dealt with the topic of high school journalism programs, including a one-page summary of the Journalism Education Association Commission report (1987).

However, throughout the report, no connection was made between high school journalism and journalism programs at the college and university level.

Mann (1988) conducted a study of students in introductory writing courses at five accredited university journalism programs to determine the relationship between the sequences communications students took in their journalism training and whether or not those students chose to pursue a news/editorial major. Most of the students surveyed rejected news/editorial studies and career paths.

In his conclusions, Mann said that students who are making career decisions without professional experience must have more opportunities to hear guest speakers "with success stories in the professions to reinforce a sense of prestige and opportunity" (p. 61). Although he mentioned the Brinkman and Jugenheimer (1977) study that found exposure to a high school journalism program was the most frequent reason for considering the field, Mann did not address the influence of high school journalism in forming students' opinions about news-editorial work.

In a study of students in the introductory media writing course at the University of Florida (Dodd, Tipton and Sumpter, 1989), students were divided into journalism students and communications students (those with majors in advertising, public relations, and broadcast). Of the journalism students, 63 percent had worked on a high school paper, 41 percent had worked on a high school yearbook, 53 percent had taken a high school

journalism course. Of the communications students 44 percent had worked on a high school newspaper, 46 percent on a yearbook, and 43 percent had taken a high school journalism course.

Students ware asked the most significant influence on their decision to work in communications. Of the journalism students, the factor that ranked first was "my own reading" (39 percent), second was "school newspaper or newspaper adviser" (21 percent) and third was "family member, older friend or someone I admired" (19 percent). Of the communications students, "my own reading" was first (42 percent), "family member, older friend or someone I admired" was second (27 percent), with "school newspaper or newspaper adviser" as fourth (10 percent).

METHODOLOGY

For this study, a 35-item, 4-page questionnaire was included in the registration materials for high school students attending the annual convention of the Florida Scholastic Press Association in Orlando in May, 1989.

The largest single battery of questions asked students to rate 10 careers (advertising, business, medicine, engineering, government, journalism, law, military, science and teaching) on five criteria. Items were modeled after those used in studies of high school students attending similar scholastic press conventions in the 1950s and 60s.

Other questions were based on items used in a 1988 American Society of Newspaper Editors study of daily newspaper employees. Items included background and demographic information, journalism ethics, interest in journalism as a career, background experiences in journalism, and perceptions about the satisfactions, dissatisfactions and opportunities in journalism work.

The survey was self-administered. As an incentive to maximize response rate, students had to turn in a completed survey form in order to get a convention T-shirt.

Of the 743 students who completed usable forms, 604 identified themselves as being White, 43 as Hispanic, 42 as Black and 22 as Asian. Another six identified themselves as "other" (usually "American") and 26 left the ethnic question blank. In terms of other demographics, 73 percent were female, 56 percent attended high schools with more than 1800 students, and 69 percent said they were "B" students. The breakdown by class was 9th grade, 4 percent; 10th, 22 percent; 11th, 49 percent; and 12th, 25 percent.

RESULTS

Of the 743 students surveyed, 35 percent had worked on their junior high newspaper and 54 percent had worked on their high school paper. Forty-two percent had taken a junior high

journalism class and 78 percent had taken a high school journalism course. Thirty percent had worked on their junior high yearbook and 54 percent had worked on their high school yearbook. Thirty-one percent had worked on a school magazine and 19 percent had worked in high school broadcasting.

When students were asked when they first decided to choose a communications career, 64 percent said they decided in high school, 28 percent said they decided in junior high and 9 percent said they decided in elementary school (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

In addition, 80 percent of the students reported being "very committed" or "somewhat committed" to working in the communications industry.

This early decision-making supported trends identified in earlier surveys of college journalism majors (Brinkman and Jugenheimer, 1977; Haugh and Oates, 1981; JEA Commission, 1987; Dodd, Tipton, and Sumpter, 1989).

Students were asked to rank ten careers on a scale from one to twelve with one being the highest score. The careers were evaluated in terms of interest of work, usefulness to society, financial reward, economic security, and prestige (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

The scores were collapsed into three categories with high being designated scores one through four, medium being five through eight, and low being nine through twelve.

Overall, students ranked journalist first in interest, third in usefulness, sixth in prestige, seventh in economic security, and eighth in financial reward.

In terms of journalism being interesting work, 62 percent of students ranked it in the high category.

Journalism also compared favorably in usefulness to society, with 59 percent of students ranking it in the high category surpassed only by medicine (67 percent) and teaching (63 percent).

On the negative side, two-thirds of students ranked journalism in the medium and low categories under financial reward and economic security. Medicine was rated the highest, with two-thirds of students rating it in the high category.

Three-fourths of students ranked journalism in the medium and high category to place it sixth in terms of prestige, with medicine and law ranking number one and two.

This is consistent with other research on communications students' perceptions of careers (Lubell, 1959; Kimball and Lubell, 1960; Bowers, 1974; Mann, 1988) (see Table 3).

Insert Table 3 about here

In addition to evaluating careers on specific criteria, students were asked to select what career they were planning to pursue. Females ranked journalism as the number-one career choice (29 percent), with advertising, business and teaching in a tie for second (8 percent each) and law at third (7 percent). Males also listed journalism as their number-one career choice (24 percent) ahead of business (10 percent), law and engineering (9 percent each), and medicine (8 percent) (see Table 4).

Insert Table 4 about here

Compared with Kimball and Lubell's 1960 survey (see Table 5) where 31 percent of women chose teaching over journalism at 22 percent, journalism now surpasses teaching in popularity among females (29 percent). Among males, journalism leads career choices at 24 percent by a comparatively wider margin, although law, engineering, medicine and business still hold favor among male high school journalists.

Insert Table 5 about here

Students also were asked what was their most significant influence in deciding to work in communications. Thirty-nine percent of the students listed working on a publication or a publication adviser as the most significant influence. "My own reading" and a teacher or a course were both listed second (18 percent), followed by family and friends (15 percent) and internships (10 percent) (see Table 6.)

Insert Table 6 about here

These results are similar to Cranford's 1960 findings (see Table 7) where approximately one-third of the students listed their number-one influence as "work on school paper," one quarter listed "teacher's encouragement," and ten percent listed relatives as their primary influence.

Insert Table 7 about here

CONCLUSIONS

Comparing the results of the 1989 survey of high school journalism students to the results of previous surveys of high school journalists reveals few changes in students' perceptions of journalism as a career.

The students in the current study ranked "journalist" as number one in terms of interest of work. The students in Lubell's study (1959) ranked "journalist" as second in interest. Journalism ranked third in usefulness in this study, compared to fifth in 1959; sixth in prestige, compared to seventh in 1959; and eighth in financial reward compared to seventh in 1959. High school students thirty years ago and now rank journalism high in terms of interest and usefulness to society and low in terms of prestige and financial reward. In other words, students who choose journalism as a career continue to do so with an awareness of economic realities. They base their decision on journalism as an interesting and useful career.

With high school journalism students, journalism continues to be the first choice in terms of career choices. Of the students in the current survey, both males and females listed journalism as their number-one career choice. Of the females, 29 percent selected journalism as their number-one career choice. Of the males, 24 percent selected journalism. This is an increase from the Kimball and Lubell (1960) study, when 20 percent of

males and 22 percent of females selected journalism as their career choice. So over thirty years, there is some indication of a modest increase in the number of high school journalism students planning a career in journalism.

High school journalism students continue to say that the major influence on their decision to go into journalism was their involvement on their high school publications. Cranford (1960) found that 36 percent of the males and 33 percent of the females identified work on school paper as the primary influence. These results are similar to the current study where 39 percent of the students said the most significant influence on their decision to work in communications was working on a publication or a publication adviser.

The students' own reading is also an important factor in their decision on journalism as a career. Of the students in the current study, 18.2 percent rank their own reading as the most important factor. Further research is needed to determine whether this reading consists of newspapers and magazines, novels or biographies of journalists.

The high school students in the current survey continue to report early career decisions. In the current study, 63.5 percent of the students said that they had made a decision on a career in communications while in high school and 36.5 percent said they had made this career decision in junior high or elementary school.

These results run contrary to the recommendations from 801 college and university journalism educators in a study conducted by the Associated Press Managing Editors Journalism Education Committee (1987). Of eight recommendations provided in the survey, journalism educators ranked "recruit at the junior high and high school levels" as the lowest priority, with 49.9 percent.

Since working on a high school publication is such an important factor in the students' decision to go into journalism as a career, commercial newspapers and college and university journalism programs should be doing more to support high school and junior high programs. They cannot wait until students reach the collegiate level to influence students to go into journalism.

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TABLE 1
When First Decided to Choose a Communications Career

High School	63.5%
Junior High	27.5
Elementary	9.0
Total	100.0%

TABLE 2
Ratings of Various Professions
(Percent of Students Interviewed Rating Professions High)

Interest of Work	%	*Financial Reward*	%	*Usefulness to Society*	%	*Economic Security*	%	*Prestige in Community*	%
Journalism	62	Medicine	67	Medicine	67	Medicine	62	Medicine	63
Advertising	52	Law	63	Teaching	63	Law	55	Law	53
Medicine	49	Engineering	53	*Journalism*	*59*	Engineering	52	Business	48
Law	48	Business	51	Law	57	Business	50	Government	48
Business	47	Government	47	Government	55	Government	46	Engineering	45
Government	41	Advertising	46	Science	55	Advertising	39	*Journalism*	*41*
Teaching	40	Science	39	Business	54	Military	39	Science	38
Engineering	39	*Journalism*	*33*	Engineering	53	*Journalism*	*34*	Military	38
Science	38	Military	32	Military	50	Science	34	Advertising	37
Military	30	Teaching	26	Advertising	44	Teaching	34	Teaching	36

TABLE 3 (Lubell,1959)
Ratings of Various Professions
(Percent of Students Interviewed Rating Professions High)

Interest of Work	%	*Financial Rewards*	%	*Family Life*	%	*Prestige*	%	*Usefulness to Society*	%
Doctor	74	Lawyer	69	Minister	65	Doctor	89	Doctor	96
Journalist	72	Doctor	67	Teacher	54	Minister	85	Teacher	90
Lawyer	63	Engineer	59	Banker	45	Lawyer	75	Minister	85
Engineer	56	Banker	57	Engineer	40	Banker	69	Engineer	62
Teacher	55	Businessman	38	Businessman	37	Engineer	42	*Journalist*	*60*
Minister	52	Public Official	18	Lawyer	34	Public Official	41	Lawyer	56
Public Official	21	*Journalist*	*8*	Doctor	26	*Journalist*	*30*	Public Official	42
Businessman	21	Minister	3	*Journalist*	*23*	Businessman	29	Banker	28
Banker	8	Teacher	1	Public Official	20	Teacher	28	Businessman	26

TABLE 4
Choice of Future Careers

Females	*Total*	*Males*	*Total*
1. *Journalism*	*29.3%*	1. *Journalist*	*23.8%*
2. Advertising	7.7	2. Business	9.5
Business	7.7	3. Lawyer	9.0
4. Teacher	7.5	Engineer	9.0
5. Lawyer	7.3	5. Doctor	7.9
6. Doctor	6.7	6. Advertising	5.3
7. Scientist	1.8	7. Scientist	4.8
8. Military	1.4	8. Military	3.7
9. Engineer	1.2	9. Government	2.1
10. Government	1.2	10. Teacher	1.6
11. Homemaker	8	11. Minister	1.1
12. Minister	4	12. Homemaker	5
Other	17.5	Other	14.8
Undecided	9.6	Undecided	6.9
Total	100.0%	Total	100.0%

TABLE 5 (Kimball and Lubell, 1960)
Choice of Future Careers

Boys	*Total*	*Girls*	*Total*
1. *Journalism*	*20%*	1. Teaching	31%
2. Engineering	17	2. *Journalism*	22
3. Medicine	14	3. Nursing	15
4. Science	12	4. Business	10
5. Law	11	5. Science	5
6. Business	10	6. Law	2
7. Teaching	6	7. Other	15
8. Other	10	Total	100%
Total	100%		

TABLE 6

Most Significant Influence on Decision to Work in Communications

Publication/Adviser	38.5%
Reading	18.2
Teacher	18.2
Family	15.4
Intern	9.8
Total	100.0%

TABLE 7 (Cranford, 1960)
What Influenced You Primarily?

	Men	Women
Work on school paper	36%	33%
Teacher's encouragement	25	26
Work on home town paper	10	10
Relatives	9	12
Movies, TV, and fiction	4	7
Other	16	12
Totals	100%	100%